

From: Bushong, Linda (MDE) **On Behalf Of** Leikert, Howard J (MDE)
Sent: Tuesday, October 11, 2011 4:15 PM
To: MDE-SchoolNutrition
Subject: Tuesday News from MDE 101111

First topic this week relates to a few questions I have received over the past few weeks. I think others may have had questions related to this topic as well. Let's start:

- 1) Meal Charges/Alternate Meals – Here are some bullet points related to these topics:
 - a. It is a local decision as to whether or not students are allowed to charge meals.
 - b. Regulations do prohibit schools from denying meals as a form of disciplinary action against free, reduced, or paid students.
 - c. Alternate meals may be reimbursable (must meet meal requirements) or non-reimbursable.
 - d. If a student has a balance due and comes to school with payment for that day's meal, the student must be provided the meal.

Now for my comments....I realize the above will not address all situations. However, my two cents worth is for each school/district to adopt a policy that will cover the different situations that may occur – do we allow students to charge? Do we allow students to charge for an "alternate" meal? Do we even charge for an "alternate" meal? Do we impose a maximum charge amount, either daily or cumulative? Are we going to have the same policy throughout the district or will it depend on the grade/age of the student? What grades do we provide an alternate meal? As a former operator, I never wanted a second grader crying in line because he/she was not free or reduced and didn't have money for the day...but the reality is you would not HAVE to serve that student (but I would have). Now, for older students you may need a different policy. In any event, develop a policy that is clearly communicated to students and parents. Due to the fact that there are not clear regulations on this topic, it allows districts latitude to develop a policy that will best serve the needs of their students. I know you probably would have preferred a more definitive answer on the whole alternate meal/charging issue but it is an area largely left alone from regulations.

- 2) MEGS+ - We realize that completing the school meals application this year was different and in many ways challenging. We will be working on the system over the next few months to make sure next year (and other child nutrition program applications) go more smoothly. This is a case where I appreciate both the patience and understanding from those people out in the districts as well as the people in the School Nutrition Programs Unit here that have been patiently answering the many questions that have come into the office. Admittedly, the process has taken up more time in the field and in the office than I would have liked. Again, thank you for your patience and understanding as we work through the problems with this new platform.
- 3) News and Notes – Our office had been putting out a "News and Notes" on a quarterly basis. As a department, we have decided to stop issuing this information. It will be replaced with my Tuesday News (which typically gets news out to the field on a more timely basis) and a biannual type newsletter that will feature success stories and other pertinent information. We are working on details of this newsletter. However, feel free to submit your success stories, with pictures, at your convenience.

- 4) Looking for a Great Program – I meet monthly with the entire School Nutrition Programs Unit (about 20 of us) and would like to hold one of our upcoming meetings at a school where we can all watch students go through the line and dine on the school meal choices of the day. So if you think you have a great program that you are willing to show off, let me know. While I would prefer it to be in the Lansing area (50 mile radius or so), I am willing to travel if you can make a good case for your program. To ease fears, we will not be there to “write you up” for any observed errors. I would just like for us to meet in an atmosphere of the business we are all in and be able to see some best practices. Are you and your program up for it? Let me know.

That’s it for this week. I’ll be back next Tuesday (hopefully, Tuesday) with more information.

Howard Leikert, MBA, SNS

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